Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate Working Group Report

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Executive Summary:

Methodology:

From Oct. 26-Dec. 11, 2012, 2182 Mason Students, Faculty, Staff, and Community members responded to a coordinated call for participation from this working group and the Appreciative Inquiry Working Group. Through in-person focus groups, town hall meetings, online surveys, online blogs, and emails, 110 participant groups responded to the following 4 questions:
1. What are the concepts that should be captured by our mission statement?
2. What are the guiding principles or values that we rely on when we are at our best?
3. What can we learn from George Mason’s work and ideals that are consistent with our unique history and values?
4. What should be the signature characteristics of a Mason graduate?
The purpose of this inquiry was to elucidate the themes, core values, and commitments for the next stage of the George Mason University Mission and Vision. The data set revealed 10 cross-cutting themes that rose out of the breadth of responses: Collaboration, Community, Continuous Learning, Diversity, Ethical Orientation, Excellence, Global, Innovation, Intellectual Mission, and Leadership.

Stakeholder Summary:

Question 1: What are the concepts that should be captured by our mission statement?

Commitment to Intellectual Mission: Nurture the Advancement of Knowledge, Promote Research, Foster Robust Communication Skills, Develop a Community of Scholars

Commitment to Diversity: Encourage Thought Diversity, Engender Cultural Competency, Develop Mutual Respect, Embrace Difference

Commitment to Global Engagement: Serve the Global Community, Cultivate Global Awareness, Promote Global Integration in the Local Community

Commitment to Community Identity: Espouse the Mason Culture, Advocate Participatory Citizenship, Encourage Service to Others, Advance Sustainability, Champion Social Justice

Commitment to Innovation: Be Ever Flexible, Embrace Risk-Taking, Inspire Problem-Solving Strategies

Commitment to Continuous Learning: Cultivate Student, Faculty, and Staff Development, Stimulate a Sense of Purpose in the Student, Prepare for Life After Mason, Strengthen Technology Competence

Question 2: What are the guiding principles or values that we rely on when we are at our best?

Commitment to a Just Community: Mason is a just and caring community where every voice counts. Investment in the development of each other and the greater good is vital. Through our collaborative partnerships in research, scholarship, economic development, and social action, Mason positively contributes to solving significant local, national, and global issues.

Commitment to Diversity of People and Ideas: Mason is a diverse community that learns from and engages difference with a willingness to advocate personal principles when key values are at stake. Mason nurtures and celebrates diversity of thought and experience through democratic engagement that supports and preserves free speech and inquiry.
Commitment to an Ethical Orientation: Mason is committed to democratic deliberation, principle-centered action, and environmentally sustainable practices. Our mutual respect and moral courage necessitates transparency in leadership, uncovering the gaps between principles and practice.

Commitment to a Spirit of Innovation: Mason is defined by and leads through a spirit of innovation, characterized by a willingness to take risks, learn from productive failures, promote flexible thinking, and encourage innovative approaches to problems.

Commitment to Lifelong Learning: Mason inspires a commitment to lifelong learning that supports the personal and professional growth of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Our community maintains a competitive edge through active discovery and scholarship. We prepare our students through learned experiences across multiple contexts, seeking opportunities to gain applied knowledge in their field of study.

Commitment to Transformational Student Learning: Mason’s student-centered and holistic learning is transformative, integrating scholarly learning, global literacy, and student development. Students discover meaning in their lives, cultivate the self, and develop a greater sense of purpose. The Mason student experience combines identity cultivation and career development ensuring graduates find a balance between fulfillment and success.

Question 3 – What can we learn from George Mason’s work and ideals that are consistent with our unique history and values?

Commitment to Critical Thinking: Fostering Interdisciplinary Intellectual Pursuit

Commitment to Leadership: Championing Independent Thought and the Power of Individuals

Commitment to Innovation and Risk-taking

Commitment to being a Change Agent

Commitment to an Ethical Orientation: Dedication to Ideals and Principles. George Mason’s principles were sometimes at odds with the reality of his life. This dichotomy exposes gaps between principle and practice, a transparency essential to solid leadership.

Question 4: What should be the characteristics of the Mason Graduate?

With an enduring pride in their alma mater, Mason graduates are resilient, civically engaged, flexible thinkers and problem solvers ready to affect positive change in their communities. Their global mindset, intercultural fluency, and appreciation for the diverse perspectives of others maximizes their abilities to think critically and to exercise collaborative leadership in real-world environments. Mason students are scholars and ethical leaders who have the faculty to adapt and innovate in diverse environments. Equipped for a balanced life, their curiosity, knowledge, imagination, passion, and strong work ethic are reflected in their commitment to the public good and pursuit of lifelong learning.

Key Themes:
Intellectual Mission; Community Engagement; Lifelong Learning; Ethical Orientation; Global; Diversity; Innovation and Leadership; Life after Mason
Methodology:

The Mission, Values and Mason Graduate Working Group was responsible for identifying concepts that should be captured by our mission statement, our core values, and signature characteristics of a Mason Graduate. This process was intended to clarify who we are as a university and guide our future.

From Oct. 26-Dec. 11, 2012, 2182 Mason Students, Faculty, Staff, and Community members responded to a coordinated call for participation from this working group and the Appreciative Inquiry Working Group. Through in-person focus groups, town hall meetings, online surveys, online blogs, and emails, this working group reached 32 stakeholder groups encompassing 1172 participants representing faculty, staff, students, and community members. Together with the Appreciative Inquiry Working Group 110 participant groups responded to the following 4 questions:

1. What are the concepts that should be captured by our mission statement?
2. What are the guiding principles or values that we rely on when we are at our best?
3. What can we learn from George Mason's work and ideals that are consistent with our unique history and values?
4. What should be the signature characteristics of a Mason graduate?

Additional questions from the Appreciative Inquiry process can be found in Appendix A.

The purpose of this inquiry was to elucidate the themes, core values, and commitments for the next stage of the George Mason University Mission and Vision. The data set revealed 10 cross-cutting themes that rose out of the breadth of responses: Collaboration, Community, Continuous Learning, Diversity, Ethical Orientation, Excellence, Global, Innovation, Intellectual Mission, and Leadership.

Constituencies represented throughout this document include faculty and staff who have been at Mason more than 20 years, Faculty Senate, Department Chairs, Academic Council, the Campus Assessment and Intervention Team (CAIT), the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Leadership Council, K-12 stakeholder focus groups, the Office of Sustainability, the Collaborative for Undergraduate Education, School of Nursing Faculty, University Information staff and student workers, Military Programs focus group, LGBT faculty, the Diversity Research Group, current participants and alumni of our Leadership Legacy Program, Mason Alumni, Graduate Council, Loudoun County focus group, NCC Cornerstones students, NCC Faculty, University Libraries, Human Resources liaisons/staff, Quality of Work Life Survey respondents, various Town Hall meetings, and additional miscellaneous faculty and community members. In addition, the 78 Appreciative Inquiry (AI) focus groups reached 1010 participants.

The data collected by this working group and the Appreciate Inquiry (AI) focus groups had consistent convergence. Our analysis of the combined data involved integrating the codes that co-occurred most frequently culminating in the illumination of key ideas for Mason's Mission, Values, and Commitments.
Question 1 Review

32 focus groups encompassing 1172 participants representing faculty, staff, students, and community members were asked the question, “what are the concepts that should be captured by our mission statement?” From the data, 6 major themes arose: Intellectual Mission, Diversity, Global, Community, Innovation, Continuous Learning. The excerpts below reflect both the major themes and supporting attributes culled from the data. Commitments listed in descending order of frequency.

1. Commitment to Intellectual Mission: Nurture the Advancement of Knowledge, Promote Research, Foster Robust Communication Skills, Develop a Community of Scholars.

- “The university’s primary mission in the 21st century is to advance knowledge. In practice, that translates to a two-part responsibility: first, to engage a research agenda with a long view...and second, to transmit an appreciation of that imperative to students.” —Academic Council

- “The ability to clearly articulate goals and mean, in writing, orally, and through mixed media.” —20+ Faculty/Staff

- “We need to be the laboratory where experiential learning coupled with academic scholarship prepares our students not only to be competitive but visionary.” —Office of Sustainability

- “We want students to be a part of the knowledge community - whether by participating in the continuous search for knowledge, by dispensing it, communicating it, appreciating it, or joining us in creating and constructing it.” —Dept. Chairs

Key Terms: Nurturing, Communication, Research, Building Knowledge, Scholarship

2. Commitment to Diversity: Encourage Thought Diversity, Engender Cultural Competency, Develop Mutual Respect, Embrace Difference.

- “Students exhibit diversity of thought and [are] able to see issues from different perspectives.” —Collaborative for Undergraduate Education

- “I hope the way that the university is so culturally diversified stays the same. I think it is awesome how when one walks through campus, they see a multitude of ethnicities around them.” —Quality of Work Life Survey

- “I...think it is important to create an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome; we are a place that embraces our differences.” —LGBT Faculty

- “Ability to understand and appreciate difference and respect the dignity of others.” —Leadership Legacy Program
• "Culturally Literate." –Human Resources

Key Terms: Thought, Respect for Difference, Cultural Competency, Embrace, Promote

3. Commitment to Global Engagement: Serve the Global Community, Cultivate Global Awareness, Promote Global Integration in the Local Community.

• "Global education – students from Mason should...serve in other countries and provide knowledge and experience..." –Campus Assessment and Intervention Team

• "Mason students are inspired to go beyond mere self-interest in order to consider their global impact and how they can be ethical leaders who strive for values that cross cultures." – Misc. Faculty

• "Understand the global ramifications of the issues or controversies in his/her major field of study—i.e., what they are, what’s at stake.” –Academic Council

• "A Mason graduate should self-identify as a global citizen, meaning that s/he would: have knowledge of and faculty with more than one culture/language; have an awareness of global political, economic, environmental, and social issues.” –Faculty Senate

• "Developing knowledge and people to serve the world.” –QEP Leadership Council

• "‘The local within the global, the global within the local.’” –NCC Faculty

Key Terms: Engagement, Service, Globally Mindful, Global as Local


• "Think of being educated as not just a means to raise one's self in society, but to raise society as a whole.” –University Information

• Investment in the welfare of others.” –Leadership Legacy Program

• "They should have the knowledge to serve sustainability of physical, cultural, socio-political environments – let’s talk about students as stewardship.” –Dept. Chairs

• Respect for individual freedoms and rights...everyone is entitled to equal treatment under the law...we must stand up for the oppressed and the marginalized. –Leadership Legacy Program

• “A commitment to social justice and the environment, and a willingness to take action in whatever areas they live and work to make the world both more just, and more environmentally sustainable.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- “We nurture innovative thinkers, movers, and shakers.” –Misc. Faculty

- “Should reflect how quickly Mason changes – needs to be nimble and flexible.” –Campus Assessment Intervention Team

- “Embracing…calculated risk taking that is thoughtful and results oriented…supporting new initiatives that fit with our strategic priorities.” –Leadership Legacy Program

- “Next wave University.” –Town Hall

- “Should be able to apply experiential and classroom learning to the problems of the world.” –Office of Sustainability

Key Terms: Flexibility, Risk-taking, Problem-solving, Mindful, Strategic

6. Commitment to Continuous Learning: Cultivate Student, Faculty, and Staff Development, Stimulate a Sense of Purpose in the Student, Prepare for Life After Mason, Strengthen Technology Competence.

- “Nurture the beauty of independent thought.” –K-12 Teachers

- “I especially want to call attention to the phrase ‘discover meaning in their own lives’ as I believe that if we can accomplish this, we will be providing the basis for our students to lead happy and productive lives…Finding meaning in one’s life and work is often cited as a key to both success and happiness with both work and personal life. It also provides guideposts for the inevitable transitions that occur during a career and in life, in general.” –20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- “Building and extending learning skills of students, faculty and staff. All of these are critical actors that need to have enhanced and extended learning skills if we are to compete with the large corpus of universities in the country as we move onto the new stage of higher education, research and development.” –Academic Council

- “Skills and perspectives to adapt to changing professions in a changing world. Technologically competent in their chosen fields, but well-rounded in the liberal arts.” –CAIT

- “Career ready – know where they are going and have the skillset to get there. Connecting education with skills.” –Town Hall
**Question 2 Review:**

Participants were asked the question, “What are the guiding principles or values that we rely on when we are at our best?” Six major commitments/values emerged from the data collected: A Just Community, Diversity of People and Ideas, Ethical Orientation, A Spirit of Innovation, Lifelong Learning, Transformational Student Learning. Each core commitment/value is listed below, followed by community member statements, summary themes representing the overall sentiments of the respondents, and key terms reflecting the attributes present in Question two as identified by the working group.

**Mason Core Commitments/Values:**

1. **Commitment to a Just Community:** Mason is a just and caring community where every voice counts. Investment in the development of each other and the greater good is vital. Through our collaborative partnerships in research, scholarship, economic development, and social action, Mason positively contributes to solving significant local, national, and global issues.

   - “A healthy community is recognized through the co-existence of mind, body, spirit with balance of social, academic, and work life.” - School of Nursing

   - “For my own education here, I find the collaborative, supportive attitude to be invaluable. It is one of the assets that drew me here. Then, after actually experiencing it throughout my time here, I have found it even more enlightening than I had expected.” -K-12 Teachers

   - “Partner with local stakeholders to serve NoVa well.”

   - “Collaboration – across boundaries, across disciplines.”

   - “General consensus is that we need to put focus on a culture where sustainability means a culture where people work together for the good. We are a microcosm of the world thus giving us an opportunity to be the example of sustainable culture, stewardship of resources. -Office of Sustainability

   - “Commitment to the common good.” –QEP Leadership Council

   - “People do good things even silently for the well-being of students.” -AI focus group

   - “A core value is the commitment to care for the people, community, worlds, being generous of spirit (respectful, ethical, moral) in a way that it empowers us to go the extra mile to realize our potential.” -AI Focus Group
• “I like that Mason is inclusive – when there is a problem we bring everyone to the table to solve it.” -AI Focus Group

Summary Themes: Giving every person a voice, Collaborative, Encourage the Heart, Equality/Justice, Social Justice, Empathy, Investing in each other and the greater good, Communication, Student, staff, faculty engagement, Catch the Mason spirit, Passion, Recognition, Commitment to work/life balance

Key Terms: Partnerships, Social Justice, Mason Culture, Service, Engagement, Student Development, Staff Development, Faculty Development, Communication

2. Commitment to Diversity of People and Ideas: Mason is a diverse community that learns from and engages difference with a willingness to advocate personal principles when key values are at stake. Mason nurtures and celebrates diversity of thought and experience through democratic engagement that supports and preserves free speech and inquiry.

• “We are committed to multiculturalism as a way of educating people.” -Department Chairs

• “Committed to research and education that builds a just society.”

• “Mason is at its best when it is guided by the notion that there is strength, power, and wisdom in diversity.”

• “Respect for diversity in thought, experience, and risk taking. We are at our best when we are willing to adapt to differences in culture.” -Office of Sustainability

• “Diversity of ideas serves our educational mission, both within or outside the classroom.”

• “When I was younger, I used to have an all or nothing approach to marriage equity, but now I think it is more about allowing the same legal, tax, health, etc. benefit. It would be better than awesome if we could make Virginia laws more LBGT friendly.” -LGBT Faculty

• “We are a unique state institution that embraces diversity of ideas, learning styles, and people (faculty, staff, students) and together aspire to make the world a better place through research, practice, and service.” -Department Chairs

• “Respect for differences and ability to dialogue about those differences.” -CAIT

• “Welcoming difference and diversity represents not only an openness to differences, but a willingness to encounter and actively live with difference and diversity, without appropriation or assimilation, but with a willingness to contest differences when key values are at stake.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff
• “Mason is at its best when we have opportunities that take full advantage of the diversity that exists on campus.” -AI Focus Group

Summary Themes: Fierce, Integrating individual strengths, Mutual respect, Valuing difference, Learning from diversity, Global perspective and response, Foster freedom of thought, Respect difference

Key Terms: Diversity, Mutual Respect, Globally Mindful, Student Development

3. Commitment to an Ethical Orientation: Mason is committed to democratic deliberation, principle-centered action, and environmentally sustainable practices. Our mutual respect and moral courage necessitates transparency in leadership, uncovering the gaps between principles and practice.

• “At the present historical moment, humans have become aware that their actions regarding natural resources and the environment affect not only the current generation but future generations as well. Environmental sustainability must also be a guiding principle.” -Faculty Senate

• “An earlier mission statement of the university stated in part that Mason would enable ‘students to develop critical, analytical, and imaginative thinking and to make well founded ethical decisions.’” And that ‘the university will prepare students to address the complex issues facing them in society and discover meaning in their own lives.’” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

Summary Themes: Transformational (thought leaders), Tracking our hypocrisy, Authenticity and transparency, Democratic deliberation, Discernment, Ethical responsibility, Compassion, Sustainability, Responsible, Principled centered action, Civility within the diverse community, Leading by example, Ethical orientation, Mutual accountability

Key Terms: Intellectual Mission, Ethical Orientation, Sustainability, Responsibility, Mutual Respect, Citizenship, Leadership, Leading by Example

4. Commitment to a Spirit of Innovation: Mason is defined by and leads through a spirit of innovation, characterized by a willingness to take risks, learn from productive failures, promote flexible thinking, and encourage innovative approaches to problems.

• “Finding new ways to skin the cat.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

• “Next wave university.” -Town Hall

• “Do not fear to go where no university has gone before.” -Faculty Senate

• “Importance of mutual respect, the search for new knowledge, the ability to think across and beyond disciplines, and the willingness to embrace complexity.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff
• “Taking risks and being valued for taking risks.”

• “Prepare innovative leaders to build a more informed world.”

• “Celebrate productive failures.”

• “Mason has an ability to create programs based on the communities needs in a simple and efficient manner, taking potential and turning it into opportunities and living by the motto, ‘If you build it, they will come.’” -AI Focus Group

• “At a large school (Harvard, Penn State, etc.), you know what you are getting – cookie cutter graduates and steeped in tradition. Mason is a blank slate and there are things you will get like a great education. But the difference is that graduates get to write their own story.” -AI Focus Group

Summary Themes: Embracing entrepreneurship, Thought changers and movers, Respond to challenge with ingenuity, Change is continuous, Flexible out of the box thinking, Adopting innovative approaches to problems, Blurring lines of delineation, Crossing boundaries, Ability to try new things

Key Terms: Innovation, Change Agent, Risk-taking, Flexibility, Interdisciplinary

5. Commitment to Lifelong Learning: Mason inspires a commitment to lifelong learning that supports the personal and professional growth of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Our community maintains a competitive edge through active discovery and scholarship. We educate our students through learned experiences across multiple contexts, seeking opportunities to gain applied knowledge in their field of study.

• “We inspire life-long learning and graduates who make our world a better place.” - Department Chairs

• “Mason has a commitment to lifelong learning in both the work and academic settings in an inclusive and ethical manner with a forward and outward look cognizant of our global impact.” -AI Focus Group

Summary Themes: Continuous improvement, Lifelong learning, Exploiting freedom and learning, Common pursuit of learning, Interdisciplinary Education and learning

Key Terms: Continuous Learning, Pursuit of Knowledge, Interdisciplinary

6. Commitment to Transformational Student Learning: Mason’s student-centered and holistic learning is transformative, integrating scholarly learning, global literacy, and student development. Students discover meaning in their lives, cultivate the self, and develop a greater sense of purpose. The Mason student experience combines identity
cultivation and career development ensuring graduates find a balance between fulfillment and success.

- "I want to call attention to the phrase ‘discover meaning in their own lives,’ as I believe that if we can accomplish this, we will be providing the basis for our students to lead happy and productive lives. I also believe that this formative aspect of higher education may be lost in the concerns around job preparation and efficiency. Finding meaning in one’s life and work is often cited as a key to both success and happiness with both work and personal life. It also provides guideposts for the inevitable transitions that occur during a career and in life.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- "Our ideal is to combine superb career training with a depth of cultural literacy so that our graduates may find a balance between fame and fortune and satisfaction on one side of the scale of life with the good, the true, and the beautiful on the other side of the scale. I sense that is what the best of my professors were trying to do and I honor them for it.” - Misc. Faculty

- “Empowering students but not entitling them. Help students understand the distinction.” -Alumni

- “We develop talent – we change lives and help shape students’ experiences.” - Collaborative for Undergraduate Education

- “Service to students – we are very student-centered and student-oriented.”

- “When we put students first, everything else falls into place.” -Military Programs

- “Learning opportunities are not capped – the sky is the limit, especially for students.”

Summary Themes: Student development, Student-centered orientation, Student learning

Key Terms: Intellectual Mission, Building Knowledge, Student Development

Question 3 Review

Participants were asked, “What we can learn from George Mason’s work and ideals that are consistent with our unique history and values?” Five key themes were reflected in the responses: Critical Thinking, Leadership, Innovation and Risk-taking, Being a Change Agent, Exposing the Gaps Between Principle and Practice, and Ethical Orientation.


- “According to http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/biographies/george-mason/beginnings.php, George Mason ‘had virtually no formal schooling and essentially educated himself from his uncle’s library’. Fortunately, our students at GMU have been given an opportunity of higher education. What is essential to their success is for them to become active in the
scholarship process and apply themselves in their studies. They could learn from Mr. Mason's willingness to study hard and apply himself.” - 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- “George Mason is a figure of the enlightenment – how the university is involved in evolving traditions of reason and critical thinking.” - Department Chairs

- “Life-long learner…Pursuit of knowledge.” – K-12 Teachers

Key Terms: Interdisciplinary, Pursuit of Knowledge, Building Knowledge, Scholarship, Collaboration

2. Commitment to Leadership: Championing Independent Thought and the Power of Individuals.

- “We’re nimble and young, allowing us to change quickly with the times.” – Leadership Legacy Alumni

- “[He] stood up for his convictions, regardless of how that would be perceived by his peers.” – Department Chairs

- “He is one of the founding fathers and saw a vision for a better country and a better way of doing things. I believe that we at GMU also have a vision for a better country through our inclusion of numerous key elements. These elements, much like the building of the USA, are accomplished by working together and allowing everyone to contribute their best. He was a leader; just like GMU is a leader in some aspects ... it would be great if we could be well-known across the USA.” – 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- “If you strive for excellence, you can achieve everything.” – New Century College Cornerstone Student

- “Stay true to personal integrity.” – 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

Key Terms: Leadership, Leading by Example, Ethical Orientation, Principle, Integrity

3. Commitment to Innovation and Risk-taking.

- “Respect for differences/religion, steadfast belief in personal responsibility, and encouragement of new ways of thinking.” – K-12 Teachers

- “George Mason was bold and not afraid to be the first to put novel ideas in writing, even if those ideas were not popular.” – K-12 Teachers

- “Believing in the strength of your conviction and not just going with the grain (e.g. Bill of Rights).” – Leadership Legacy Alumni
• “Freedom of expression.” – 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

Key Terms: Innovation, Risk-taking, Flexibility, Strategic, Problem-Solving

4. Commitment to being a Change Agent.

• “Great things have small/humble beginnings.” - New Century College Cornerstone Student

• “Reflections on history can inform understanding of the future.” – Diversity Research Group

• “Be ready to learn from the world.” – 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

• “The value we place on cultural diversity supports the ideal of individual rights that George Mason fought to protect. The individual has gifts and abilities to contribute and at Mason, we have the courage (and the environment) to share thoughts on what matters to the individual yet benefits the group as a whole.” – Focus Group, Loudoun

Key Terms: Leadership, Change Agent, Risk-taking, Flexibility

5. Commitment to an Ethical Orientation: Dedication to Ideals and Principles. George Mason’s principles were sometimes at odds with the reality of his life. This dichotomy exposes gaps between principle and practice, a transparency essential to solid leadership.

• “A former revolutionary patriot who fought for what he believed. I see this connecting to GMU fighting for integrity of the future.” - K-12 Teachers

• “Stay true to personal integrity.” – 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

• “George Mason moved things forward but he fell short – one of two largest slaveholders in Virginia, he had a strong sense of duty.” – QEP Leadership Council

• “The emphasis on human rights is key and it must be extended to future generations.” - Faculty Senate

• “We can embrace the complexity of George Mason’s history as a revolutionary exponent of human freedom while at the same time owning slaves, allowing us to acknowledge (while not excusing) his errors and blind spots in historical context without losing the genius of his contribution. UVa and Monticello have recently grappled with the same issues with regard to Mr. Jefferson and have found that it triggers a very interesting and important discussion.” – Town Hall

Key Terms: Ethical Orientation, Integrity, Principle, Leadership, Leading by Example
**Question 4 Review:**

Participants were asked to consider, “What should be the characteristics of the Mason Graduate?” From the data eight key themes emerged: Intellectual Mission, Community Engagement, Lifelong Learning, Ethical Orientation, Global Mindset, Diversity, Innovative and Capable Leadership, Life After Mason. Given this, our working group has generated competencies of the Mason Graduate that embody each of these key themes. What follows are supporting quotations from the working group data for each of the eight key themes. Commitments listed in descending order of frequency.

1. **Intellectual Mission: Mason students are knowledgeable scholars, critical thinkers, and engaged problem solvers.**

   - “An ability to think clearly, critically and creatively in constructive dialogue with others.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

   - “A scholar who can critically evaluate and integrate burgeoning sources of data; the ability to appreciate multiple perspectives (socio-cultural and academic).” -Faculty Senate

   - “Mason graduates will understand not only the current scholarly or professional consensus about key topics and/or issues in their disciplines, but also understand the methodology underlying that consensus, the nature of ongoing debates about the subject, and how and why understandings of a topic or issue might change. In other words, they will not only have acquired disciplinary knowledge in the course of their college career, but also an understanding of how disciplinary knowledge is constructed, how it changes over the time, and how they might participate in the process of creating and modifying the disciplinary consensus about a subject in response to new evidence, questions, and/or methodologies. When applying disciplinary knowledge to practical situations, Mason graduates will be similarly aware of how current professional guidelines, “best practices,” and the like were created; how and why they might change (and/or need to be modified to fit a given situation); and how the graduate might participate in that process.” - Miscellaneous Faculty

   - “We want students to be a part of the knowledge community- whether by participating in the continuous search for knowledge, by dispensing it, communicating it, appreciating it, or joining us in creating and constructing it.” -Department Chairs

   - “Technologically competent in their chosen fields, but well-rounded in the liberal arts; having the research and critical analysis skills to look at and consider perspectives.” - Campus Assessment and Intervention Team

   - “Hungry and anxious to learn; rigorous, disciplined scholars and critical thinkers; engaged in scholarship and learning in the service of something (e.g., the greater good and making a difference); folks who know how to approach, attack, and solve a problem;”
curiosity, as a driver to discovery, people who act on their curiosity, making it actionable.” - QEP Leadership Council

Key Terms: Intellectual Mission, Pursuit of Knowledge, Building Knowledge, Communication, Research, Scholarship

2. Community Engagement: Mason students are engaged citizens who contribute to the greater good and well-being of others.

- “Thinking of being educated as not just a means to raise one’s self in society, but to raise society as a whole.” ~University Information Staff and Student Worker
- “Commitment to serving one’s communities.” - Faculty Senate
- “Seeing the greater world beyond themselves, giving to the community in multiple ways.” - Campus Assessment and Intervention Team
- “A positively contributing member of our national society and our global society.” - K-12 teacher stakeholder
- “They should understand the diversity, the importance of an informed, compassionate stewardship both in the local community and the global world.” - Office of Sustainability

Key Terms: Citizenship, Service, Social Justice, Sustainable

3. Lifelong Learning: Mason students exhibit curiosity and understand the importance of continuous learning.

- “Our students should know how to learn (e.g., lifelong learners).” - Department Chairs
- “Continuous learning and adaptability.” -Campus Assessment and Intervention Team
- “Mason graduates will be confident, independent learners, able to explore new fields on their own. While they may choose to pursue graduate or other training, they won’t feel that they must receive specific training or instruction in a task or field before performing/entering it.” - Miscellaneous Faculty
- “Value lifelong learning.” - Collaborative for Undergraduate Education

Key Terms: Life After Mason, Student Development, Mentorship, Active Growth

4. Ethical Orientation: Mason students are people of integrity, responsible and generous.

- “Strong sense of ethics and sense of how to apply ethical principles to real world problems.” - Faculty Senate
• “A willingness to question and take responsibility for their own beliefs and values, as well as the values of the communities of which they are a part…a commitment to social justice and the environment, and a willingness to take action in whatever areas they live and work to make the world both more just, and more environmentally sustainable.” - 20+ Year Faculty/Staff

• “Exhibit moral courage and stand by your informed convictions.” - Campus Assessment and Intervention Team

• “Able to critically examine and analyze concepts. Apply these concepts ethically in their respective communities.” - Leadership Legacy Program

• “A person who is courageous enough to be truthful even when the truth is not pretty or convenient.” - K-12 teacher stakeholder

**Key Terms: Integrity, Principle, Respect, Responsibility**

5. **Global Mindset:** Mason students are globally minded and interested and practiced in working with individuals from other countries and cultures.

• “The signature graduate should have a global perspective, ability to adapt to and innovate in diverse environments. This area is where the jobs are and we need to ensure that our students have a global perspective. They should be highly educated, fluid in navigating diverse situations and challenges and can move and innovate between these various groups, perspectives and challenges.” - Military Programs Focus Group

• “Students who are globally-minded, students who can think beyond the text and act on their knowledge.” - QEP Leadership Council

• “Value of learning from other cultures and countries...learning from difference.” - Campus Assessment and Intervention Team

• “Able to approach problems/opportunities from a multi-disciplinary perspective to understand the global system.” - Leadership Legacy Program

• “Understand the global ramifications of the issues or controversies in his/her major field of study—i.e., what they are, what’s at stake.” - Academic Council

**Key Terms: Engagement, Mindful, Service, Flexibility**

6. **Diversity:** Mason students possess an intercultural fluency that is marked by the ability to engage in perspective-taking and engage with the diverse perspectives of others.

• “A commitment to diversity and openness to difference; globally aware and sensitive to cultural difference...appreciates differences, while working to effectively bridge them.” - 20+ Year Faculty/Staff
• “Students have experienced an environment with a diverse array of community members, preparing them to work with others different from themselves.” - Department Chairs

• “Students exhibit diversity of thought and able to see issues from different perspectives, ability to work across differences.” - Collaborative for Undergraduate Education

• “We are a place that embraces our differences.” - LGBT Faculty

• “Culturally competent.” - Diversity Research Group

• “To develop a sense of diversity within everyone. Diversity is important and respect for it is essential for the world we live in right now. We should develop a sense of responsibility and commitment to our education, country, and ourselves.” - NCC Cornerstones Student

Key Terms: Cultural Competency, Mutual Respect, Embrace, Promote

7. Innovative and Capable of Leadership: Mason students are ethical, resourceful, and collaborative leaders who have an ability to innovate and adapt in diverse environments.

• “People who enact leadership or act as leaders – we like the idea of drilling down on other individual concepts that come together into a coherent view of leadership.” - QEP Leadership Council

• “Committed to advocacy, service, and leadership... They should have the knowledge to serve sustainability of physical, cultural, socio-political environment – let’s talk about students as stewards” - Department Chairs

• “They should be innovative change agents, curious and experienced but humble...they should have reverence for learning, and an intrinsic value for their responsibility to their environment (man and non-human).” - Office of Sustainability

• “A signature graduate should use habits of mind to achieve at higher levels, be bold enough to thoughtfully invent new ideas and open enough to thoughtfully revise those ideas upon new information... Possess a balance of theoretical, research, and field experience... Intellectual curiosity, intellectual honesty, and intellectual humility...a leader for the 21st century; person who does what is right not what is partisan, who does what is right, even if it is not easy, even if it brings out scorn and the nay-Sayers, even if it is uncomfortable.”- K-12 teacher stakeholder

• “Comfort with taking the untraveled path, innovating.” - Faculty Senate

• “Confidence to innovate – students have to be brave and there has to be the possibility of failing in order to succeed.” - QEP Leadership Council
• “We want student who are thinking of the next innovation; to implement and apply the knowledge they’ve learned, to contribute something for the common good.” - Graduate Council

• “Be adaptable and flexible.” - Leadership Legacy Alumni

**Key Terms: Innovation, Flexibility, Risk-taking, Problem-solving, Change Agent**

8. Life after Mason: Mason students are resilient, equipped with a strong work ethic, prepared to lead well-balanced lives, and effect positive change in their communities.

• “Innate ability to get the job done. We want people who represent our university by having employers say “Wow, I want to hire more Mason grads!” Determination for excellence. It doesn’t have to be a certain gpa, but it should be an ‘attitude.’” - Miscellaneous faculty

• “Flexible thinkers who can readily adapt to changing professions, jobs, and careers.” - Department Chairs

• “Well-rounded, clear view of the world and job market in which they are embarking, and capable of extending their learning with the research-laden foundation they acquired at GMU...a lifelong learner.” - K-12 teacher stakeholder

• “The Mason Graduate should be of sufficient reputation in order to, upon graduation and across-the-board, enter into positions earmarked for leadership potential within the hiring organization.” -University Libraries

• “Being adaptive, creative content communicators for the next century!” - Loudoun focus group

• “Ready to face the world and make an impact...know your area of study enough to perform well in the real world...the tools and skills to compete in the modern workforce.” - NCC Cornerstones Student

**Key Terms: Continuous Learning, Student Development, Flexibility, Communication, Leadership, Change Agent**

**Aspirational Commitments:**

**Commitment to Global Engagement**

This committee fully endorses integrating global themes into the Mason Mission and Vision Statements. Concerns arose over definitions and modifiers. Several committee members voiced the inability to simply define global on its own but reflected on various global themes including: global engagement, globally mindful, global education, global citizenship, global service, global community, global sustainability, and global leadership. Additional discussion focused on the
need to discern differences between global and international. This working group hopes the Steering Committee will address whether to embed the global label throughout the discussion or separate it as a value unto itself.

- “A Mason graduate should self-identify as a global citizen, meaning that s/he would: have knowledge of and facility with more than one culture/language; have an awareness of global political, economic, environmental, and social issues.” –Faculty Senate

- “Understand the global ramifications of the issues or controversies in his/her major field of study—i.e., what they are, what’s at stake” –Academic Council

- “Global, Ethical Leaders.” –Misc. Faculty

- “Global education – students from Mason should be able to serve in other countries and provide knowledge and experience to other countries” –CAIT

Commitment to Sustainability

This working group advocates Mason’s continued role as a standard-bearer for sustainability and hopes the Steering Committee will consider both the greening of Mason and Mason’s leadership amongst front running Universities concerned with issues surrounding sustainability. Further consideration should be given to Mason’s impact on the Northern Virginia Area as an exemplar of sustainable growth.

- “A commitment to social justice and the environment, and a willingness to take action in whatever areas they live and work to make the world both more just, and more environmentally sustainable.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- “A willingness to question and take responsibility for their own beliefs and values, as well as the values of the communities of which they are a part...a commitment to social justice and the environment, and a willingness to take action in whatever areas they live and work to make the world both more just, and more environmentally sustainable.” -20+ Year Faculty/Staff

- “At the present historical moment, humans have become aware that their actions regarding natural resources and the environment affect not only the current generation but future generations as well. Environmental sustainability must also be a guiding principle.” -Faculty Senate

Commitment to Nurturing Diversity

This working group asks the Steering Committee to address diversity not only as it relates to the student population but also as it affects both administrators and faculty. Concerns arose over racial, ethnic, and gender disparities for both of those segments of the Mason Community.
• “Need to grow our faculty diversity, particularly... ethnic minorities.” –Department Chairs

• “I also think it is important to create an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome; we are a place that embraces our differences.” –LGBT Faculty

• “We are a unique state institution that embraces diversity of ideas, learning styles, and people (Faculty, Staff, and Students).” –Department Chairs
The Vision Process: A Backgrounder

Data Collection

From Oct. 26 – Dec. 11, 2012 members of the Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate Working Group facilitated meetings with key stakeholder groups within the Mason Community seeking responses to the four questions detailed in this report.

Those groups included: faculty and staff who have been at Mason more than 20 years, Faculty Senate, Department Chairs, Academic Council, the Campus Assessment and Intervention Team (CAIT), the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Leadership Council, K-12 stakeholder focus groups, the Office of Sustainability, the Collaborative for Undergraduate Education, School of Nursing Faculty, University Information staff and student workers, Military Programs focus group, LGBT faculty, the Diversity Research Group, current participants and alumni of our Leadership Legacy Program, Mason Alumni, Graduate Council, Loudoun County focus group, NCC Cornerstones students, NCC Faculty, University Libraries, Human Resources liaisons/staff, Quality of Work Life Survey respondents, various Town Hall meetings, and additional miscellaneous faculty and community members.

A summary of respondent feedback for each stakeholder meeting was submitted to the Working Group’s research assistant for organization and later coding via the mixed methods analysis software, Dedoose.

Data Synthesis

On Dec. 12, 2012 the Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate Working Group met to review the collected data and identify the cross-cutting themes that arose from stakeholder feedback: Collaboration, Community, Continuous Learning, Diversity, Ethical Orientation, Excellence, Global, Innovation, Intellectual Mission, and Leadership. These themes, in addition to their assigned descriptors, became the parent and child codes utilized during data analysis. A full list of parent and child codes can be found in chart 2 of this appendix.

Data Analysis

Each stakeholder response was uploaded into the qualitative and mixed methods analysis software Dedoose. The data was broken up into the four major respondent groups: Faculty, Staff, Students, and Community. Each major group was divided into the subgroups representing the constituencies within them.

Faculty: Colleges, Faculty Groups, 20+ Year Faculty and Staff, Miscellaneous Faculty
Staff: Administrative Staff, Staff Groups, Miscellaneous Staff
Students: Alumni, Miscellaneous Students
Community: K-12 teachers, Loudoun, Town Halls, Miscellaneous Community
The below charts illustrate the percentage of respondent feedback by group.

**Faculty Responses**
- Colleges
- Faculty Groups
- 20+ Year Faculty and Staff
- Misc. Faculty

**Staff Responses**
- Admin. Staff
- Staff Groups
- 20+ Year Faculty and Staff
- Misc. Staff

**Student Responses**
- Misc. Students
- Alumni

**Community Responses**
- K-12 Teachers
- Loudoun Teachers
- Town Halls
- Misc. Community
Once organized by group descriptor, each data set was coded based on the major and minor themes identified by the Working Group. Each code and its frequency can be seen in the chart below.

Chart 2: Code Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration (42)</th>
<th>Community (143)</th>
<th>Continuous Learning (119)</th>
<th>Ethical Orientation (126)</th>
<th>Excellence (50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships (21)</td>
<td>Citizenship (41)</td>
<td>Active Growth (9)</td>
<td>Human Rights (11)</td>
<td>Acknowledging (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service (4)</td>
<td>Green (25)</td>
<td>Faculty Development (17)</td>
<td>Individual Rights (16)</td>
<td>Celebrating (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital (1)</td>
<td>Mason Culture (44)</td>
<td>Life After Mason (60)</td>
<td>Integrity (31)</td>
<td>Dignity (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Environment (20)</td>
<td>Mentorship (12)</td>
<td>Mutual Respect (22)</td>
<td>Pride (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service (30)</td>
<td>Staff Development (11)</td>
<td>Principle (11)</td>
<td>Promoting (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Justice (16)</td>
<td>Student Development (69)</td>
<td>Respect (10)</td>
<td>Excellence (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainable (18)</td>
<td>Technology Competence (21)</td>
<td>Social Justice (22)</td>
<td>Acknowledging (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diversity (118)       | Global (59)       | Innovation (129)       | Intellectual Mission (150) | Leadership (96)  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural (21)</td>
<td>Engagement (13)</td>
<td>Flexibility (38)</td>
<td>Application (14)</td>
<td>Change Agent (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace (12)</td>
<td>Global and Local (7)</td>
<td>Mindful (14)</td>
<td>Building Knowledge (21)</td>
<td>Humility (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote (12)</td>
<td>Globally Mindful (13)</td>
<td>Problem Solving (11)</td>
<td>Communication (29)</td>
<td>Leading: Example (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect (24)</td>
<td>International (3)</td>
<td>Risk Taking (22)</td>
<td>Inter-Disciplinary (21)</td>
<td>Leading: Middle (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought (27)</td>
<td>Service (15)</td>
<td>Strategic (2)</td>
<td>Nurturing (31)</td>
<td>Service (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainable (0)</td>
<td>Pursuit of Knowledge (22)</td>
<td>Research (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarship (21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After an initial survey of the aggregate data, the frequency of codes by question was determined to identify the major concepts that arose out of each thematic area.

Chart 3: Code Frequency by Question

This frequency data was utilized by the working group to determine the core commitments for the Mason Mission and Values as broken down by question in this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Question 4</th>
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<td>Leadership (14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity (14)</td>
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<td>Change Agent (10)</td>
<td>Community (15)</td>
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<td>Diversity (14)</td>
<td>Ethical Orientation (9)</td>
<td>Continuous Learning (14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community (12)</td>
<td>Innovation (11)</td>
<td>Individual Rights (5)</td>
<td>Global (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Learning (11)</td>
<td>Community (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diversity (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Life After Mason (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many responses that were assigned more than one code given the diversity of themes represented. Below is a chart of corresponding parent and child codes that co-occurred twenty or more times throughout the process.
## Chart 4: Code Co-occurrence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Continuous Learning</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships (21)</td>
<td>Student Development (52)</td>
<td>Mason Culture (39)</td>
<td>Thought (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life After Mason (43)</td>
<td>Citizenship (32)</td>
<td>Respect Difference (24)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Service (26)</td>
<td>Cultural Competence (21)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Green (23)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Environment (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Orientation</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Intellectual Mission</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice (20)</td>
<td>Flexibility (31)</td>
<td>Nurturing (31)</td>
<td>Change Agent (42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Taking (20)</td>
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<td>Research (26)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Building Knowledge (22)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarship (22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pursuit of Knowledge (21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WRITE YOUR OWN STORY

An Appreciative Inquiry for Leveraging Mason’s Strengths in Creating a New Strategic Vision

For the President’s Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate Working Group

NANCE LUCAS
PAM PATTERSON
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EDITORS

11 JANUARY 2013
Write Your Own Story
An Appreciative Inquiry for Leveraging Mason's Strengths in
Creating a New Strategic Vision

11 January 2013

Implied in...scholarly research...is the intriguing suggestion that human systems are largely heliotropic in character, meaning that they exhibit an observable and largely automatic tendency to evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future. What I will argue is that just as plants of many varieties exhibit a tendency to grow in the direction of sunlight, there is an analogous process going on in all human systems.

---David Cooperrider

Executive Summary

On August 17, 2012, the Board of Visitors adopted a resolution that tasked George Mason University President, Dr. Angel Cabrera with the creation of a new strategic vision for Mason which will be the basis for a new academic strategic plan and a new campaign. The Mission, Values, and the Mason Graduate working group, one of the eight working groups engaged in this process, partnered with MasonLeads to utilize an appreciative inquiry (AI) process for accomplishing their goals. MasonLeads co-chairs Nance Lucas and Pam Patterson collaborated with Tojo Thatchenkery, Director of the Organizational Development and Knowledge Management (ODKM) graduate program, in planning and implementing this strengths-based approach. Six Mason employees, who are ODKM alumni and who received advanced training in appreciative inquiry, were included as AI facilitators along with MasonLeads members and eight Mason volunteer facilitators. This report is an account of how appreciative inquiry was used to
contribute to the strategic vision, to identify Mason core values, and to describe key attributes of
the ideal Mason Graduate.

MasonLeads and AI Facilitators conducted 78 focus groups, involving approximately 900
participants from mid-November to mid-December who engaged in face-to-face interviews. An
open enrollment AI Event of students, faculty, staff, and alumni was conducted on December 11,
2012. Approximately 110 + enthusiastic participants from Mason’s multiple campuses convened
at Mason Hall.

Applying their training and experience with the AI process, Evan Baum, Stacey
Guenther, Linda Kovac, Nance Lucas, Leslie Painter, Pam Patterson, Laura Phelps, and Tojo
Thatchenkery poured through the massive amount of interview transcripts of responses from
approximately 900 participants. This data analysis subgroup identified common themes, core
values, and attributes of the ideal Mason Graduate detailed in this report. The major findings
include eight positive deviant characteristics of the university, four core value statements, and a
68 word descriptive paragraph of The Mason Graduate.

I. Introduction

There are two ways to analyze an organization. The first approach is to ask what is wrong. Why
is the organization behind the product launch? Why is the university falling behind in attracting
top students? Why did the nonprofit fail to meet the campaign goals? It is often very tempting to
delve into this problem solving approach, under the assumption that if we can find the root
causes of our problems and deficiencies, we can fix them. After all, this is the methodology that
has been employed by the majority of consulting firms for the last several decades. This problem
solving approach has produced a prolific “deficit discourse,” one that is based on bringing to surface everything that is wrong with people, groups, organizations, society, and nations.

Against this dominant paradigm, an alternate one has gradually emerged that is based on reframing\(^1\) and seeing what is good in a situation or system. Known as appreciative inquiry\(^2\) (AI), this second approach of analyzing an organization is based on a social constructionist paradigm and demonstrates that by focusing on what is working in a system or an organization, we can release its generative potential to accomplish new goals that were previously thought to be unattainable. By starting with positive stories where stakeholders experienced a sense of accomplishment, AI seeks to identify the core values and strengths of an organization and create a systematic way to build on them\(^3\). The resulting discourse taps into the basic desire of individuals to make a positive difference in the lives of people around them. Appreciative inquiry is thus a generative, fast-paced, and inclusive process that brings out the best in individuals, group, and organizations. It has been successfully applied in a diverse array of settings - government, profit, nonprofit, and international organizations\(^4\).

This report is an account of how the appreciative inquiry process was used in contributing to a strategic vision for George Mason University. On August 17, 2012, the Board of Visitors adopted a resolution that tasked Dr. Angel Cabrera with the creation of a new strategic vision for

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\(^4\) See the Appreciative Inquiry Commons cite maintained by Case Western Reserve University for a comprehensive list of AI applications. ( [http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/) ).
Mason which will be the basis for a new academic strategic plan and a new campaign. The president, who is familiar with appreciative inquiry, is keen to produce a concise and memorable mission statement, a set of core values describing “The Mason Way” of doing things, and a profile of the signature “Mason Graduate.” The Mission, Values and the Mason Graduate working group, one of the eight working groups engaged in this process, partnered with MasonLeads to utilize an appreciative inquiry based approach for accomplishing their goals. MasonLeads co-chairs Nance Lucas and Pam Patterson collaborated with Tojo Thatchenkery, Director of the Organizational Development and Knowledge Management (ODKM) graduate program, which has provided advanced training in appreciative inquiry for several staff members who are alumni of the program. In 2008, MasonLeads, after formal training, facilitated a university-wide appreciative inquiry initiative around the theme of leadership at Mason. In Fall 2012, MasonLeads and ODKM experts collaborated on designing and executing a representative AI process to tap into what is working and what is exciting about Mason.

Write Your Own Story, the title of our AI report, also was a prominent theme frequently heard in describing the Mason experience. This phrase captures the autonomy that Mason students and the general community experience when provided with opportunities to generate new initiatives. Write Your Own Story illustrates the commitment that individuals demonstrate when they consistently go the extra mile, ensuring greater success, and capturing the essence of life-long learning seen consistently in the data. As a microcosm of the Mason experience, Write Your Own Story also reveals the signature profile of The Mason Graduate.

This report includes a description of the methodology and major findings from the data. The major findings are outlined in the following sections: positive deviant characteristics of George Mason University, core values statements, and The Mason Graduate.
II. Methodology

Nance Lucas and Pam Patterson, Mason Leads co-chairs and Tojo Thatchenkery, Director of the ODKM program, created a working group of highly talented and committed facilitators including MasonLeads, ODKM alumni, and select volunteers (see Appendix A). They also met with Sarah Nutter, Presidential Fellow coordinating the strategic planning efforts on the President’s behalf, and the Mission, Values and the Mason Graduate working group to seek their input. A planning session was held on November 8, 2012 when MasonLeads and the AI facilitator group developed best practices specific to conducting AI facilitation and report documentation.

A set of carefully designed AI questions (see Appendix B) were distributed and a project plan was drafted for conducting focus groups using a representative sample of the Mason community across the three campuses. The questions, designed specifically to support the charge of the Mission, Values, and Mason Graduate Working Group, sought to capture positive Mason experiences, images, and the distinctiveness of the ideal Mason graduate, core values that give life to Mason, three wishes to heighten Mason’s visibility and trajectory, and Mason at its best.

During the next five weeks, MasonLeads and the AI Facilitators Group conducted 78 focus groups, directly reaching approximately 900 participants. Within these 78 focus groups, special outreach was provided to faculty and staff with 20, 30, 40+ years of service, alumni leadership (past and current association leaders), Facilities Department employees, and the Staff Senate to ensure a wider representation of voices (note: faculty participation was strong in various focus groups). The AI facilitators meticulously captured notes, quotes, and stories from
interviews and focus groups, and then provided a summary of highlights (See Appendix C). The process created visible positive energy and buzz across the university as students, staff, faculty, and alumni explored what was working well at Mason and its core values and strengths. Participants in the focus groups reported a newfound enthusiasm for being part of creating a new strategic vision for Mason and shared their desire to support the process in the future. Numerous participants expressed both interest in learning more about the AI process for their own units and in some cases, requested that AI activities continue at Mason beyond the strategic planning process. A total of 78 focus groups were held with various units, departments, academic courses, and organizations (See Appendix D).

An open enrollment AI Event of students, faculty, staff, and alumni was conducted on December 11, 2012. Approximately 110 enthusiastic participants from Mason’s multiple campuses convened at Mason Hall. Over a span of two and a half hours, powerful and transformative stories about the Mason experience and the Mason Graduate were shared in small focus groups followed by a plenary debrief session. Each focus group was co-facilitated by a lead facilitator and a scribe. The working group facilitators captured the data with written interview summaries, which were submitted in mid-December. A final session of the AI facilitators was held at the end of the semester for a final debriefing and appreciation lunchcon. These AI facilitators provided a substantive analytical summary of what they had observed during the previous five weeks of data collection and offered their own reflections about the AI process and the insights they gained.

III. Results and Analysis
A subgroup of experienced AI facilitators, Evan Baum, Stacey Guenther, Linda Kovac, Nance Lucas, Leslie Painter, Pam Patterson, Laura Phelps, and Tojo Thatchenkery, poured through the massive amount of interview transcripts of responses from approximately 900 participants. It is important to note that all 900 respondents participated in face-to-face interviews and focus groups, maximizing the full potential of the AI approach. Using thematic analysis, the data was organized into various categories and clusters. The data was summarized in the aggregate, allowing for the participants’ anonymity.

A. Positive Deviant Characteristics of George Mason University

The following are major themes that emerged from the data when participants described what they value most about Mason and Mason’s overall strengths, including select corresponding participant quotes. We have captured these as Positive Deviant Characteristics of the Mason experience, expressed frequently and deeply by many participants. These Positive Deviant Characteristics are outliers in that they describe the highest hallmarks of the Mason experience described by students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Positive deviant characteristics are “intentional behaviors that significantly depart from the norms of a reference group in honorable ways”.

These hallmark characteristics emerged repeatedly in the data.

1. Mason is a caring community
2. Students, faculty, and staff are committed to lifelong learning
3. Mason is an inclusive and collaborative community
4. Mason leverages our uncommon geographic location, transforming our local into national and global laboratories for learning
5. Mason fosters a culture of entrepreneurship and encourages innovation
6. Mason empowers students, faculty, staff, and alumni to express moral courage and principled action
7. Shared leadership is valued, practiced, and is visible at all levels of the institution
8. Mason is a student-centered institution

B. Core Value Statements

Based on the supporting data of each of these Positive Deviant Characteristics, we distilled and formulated four core value statements. While there was an abundance of positive statements about what participants’ perceived as the institution’s core values, these four values emerged repeatedly in the data and in response to various questions about Mason’s strengths, values, and characteristics of when it performs at its best.

1. Mason is a caring and ethical community committed to the well-being of students, faculty, staff, and alumni
2. Mason embraces the diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives, viewing diversity as an essential element of excellence and a component of a global mindset
3. Mason recognizes that innovation and entrepreneurship are key to our success, encouraging risk-taking, curiosity, and challenging the status quo
4. Mason inspires a commitment to lifelong learning, bridging formal learning with real world experiences

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The following section provides greater detail and examples of participants' quotes that underscore the meaning of each of these core values:

1. **Mason is a caring and ethical community committed to the well-being of students, faculty, staff, and alumni.**
   - Mason cares for the individual student with individualized responses
   - There is a commitment to the common good
   - All community members matter
   - People do good things even silently for the well-being of students
   - Mason is a large university with a small college feeling
   - Mason has a culture of appreciating and respecting others
   - Faculty and staff come together to advance shared principles
   - Mason is an environmentally conscious institution
   - Mason fosters a culture where community members span boundaries and collaborate across units and programs
   - Mason is a relational community encouraging interdisciplinary and inter-unit collaborations
   - Mason community members feel a deep sense of pride in the successes of the institution

"A core value is the commitment to care (flourish) for the people, community, worlds, being generous of spirit (respectful, ethical, moral) in a way that it empowers us to go the extra mile to realize our potential." --AI Focus Group Participant

"We have raised this place, shaped and nurtured it - we are proud of our work." --20, 30, 40+ Employee AI Focus Group Participant
“Mason is a little school that became a big university but kept its small school mindset.” --AI Focus Group Participant

“I like that Mason is inclusive – when there is a problem we bring everyone to the table to solve it.” --AI Focus Group Participant

2. Mason embraces the diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives, viewing diversity as an essential element of excellence and a component of a global mindset.

- Mason embraces all cultures, connecting the community to the world
- Mason’s diversity allows others to learn how to communicate
- Mason hosts an intergenerational community
- Mason is inclusive of diverse perspectives and ideologies
- Mason celebrates its unique characteristics and perspectives

“Diversity is a core value as we accept, welcome, and embrace the diverse thoughts/action/culture of.....” --AI Focus Group Participant

“Mason leverages our diversity to solve problems from different perspectives for the unity of all and to co-exist globally and peacefully.” --AI Focus Group Participant

“The diversity at Mason teaches you how to communicate: if you are around a diverse group, you learn how to interact in different situations.” --AI Focus Group Participant

“Mason is at its best when we have opportunities that take full advantage of the diversity that exists on campus.” – AI Focus Group Participant

3. Mason recognizes that innovation and entrepreneurship are key to our success, encouraging risk-taking, curiosity, and challenging the status quo.

- Mason’s culture is nimble and agile, making it possible for experimentation and risk taking
• Mason provides all of its members the freedom to think outside of the box and do things differently
• Mason supports an environment where curiosity and openness to new ideas are encouraged
• Mason provides a culture where it is safe to learn from mistakes and where growth and change are constants

“Mason is organic. We breathe in and out. We recalibrate after we look at the marketplace and the landscape around us. We have a sense of attunement.” --Al Focus Group Participant

“Mason has an ability to create programs based on the communities needs in a simple and efficient manner, taking potential and turning it into opportunities and living by the motto, ‘If you build it, they will come’.” --Al Focus Group Participant

“We step outside of boundaries of culture and environment to hear, question, challenge, and be curious in creating what’s needed to advance our goal. We become what we envision and make our vision a reality.” --Al Focus Group Participant

“George Mason ‘the man’ was a rebel with a cause. He can inspire us all to push for innovation and change even when sometimes it would be easier to stay where we are.” --Al Focus Group Participant

“At a large school (Harvard, Penn State, etc.) you know what you are getting – cookie cutter graduates and steeped in tradition [sic]. Mason, also as a large university, is a blank slate and there are things you will get like a great education[sic]. But the difference is that graduates get to write their own story.” --Al Focus Group Participant

4. Mason inspires a commitment to lifelong learning, bridging formal learning with real world experiences

• Faculty, staff, and students are engaged in lifelong learning inside and outside of the classroom
• Self-exploration and continuous learning are encouraged and rewarded
• Faculty are committed to bridging formal learning to real life experiences, giving students a competitive advantage upon graduation

• Mason is a laboratory for transformational learning experiences

• Students have a voice in shaping their learning and engage with each other in furthering their learning

"Mason is a place where things happen – our students are engaged in the political process and political candidates come here to rally support for themselves and their agendas." --AI Focus Group Participant

"Mason has a commitment to lifelong learning in both the work and academic settings in an inclusive and ethical manner with a forward and outward look cognizant of our global impact." --AI Focus Group Participant

"Learning opportunities are not capped – the sky is the limit, especially for students." --AI Focus Group Participant

"Mason is at its best in a learning community when everyone is moving forward together." --AI Focus Group Participant

C. The Mason Graduate

The summary of The Mason Graduate was derived from themes and categories based on data analysis and in response to the ideal Mason graduate question. The Mason graduate is the sum of the people that the university decides to have in place to guide those students. We strongly encourage a continued focus on hiring and retaining talented faculty and staff who can help students to grow.

A number of salient themes emerged in the data when reviewing the responses to the question about the attributes of the Mason graduate. A confounding variable in the data is that some responded to this question with what they believe are the aspirational characteristics of the Mason graduate, while others shared what they believe are the attributes of the Mason graduate.
The top attributes and descriptors of the Mason graduate include engaged citizen and sense of responsibility, open-minded, passionate, prepared for real world challenges, global mindset, entrepreneurial, and change agent.

The following paragraph represents the major themes from the AI responses related to the attributes of the Mason graduate:

*With an enduring pride in their alma mater, Mason graduates are resilient, civically engaged problem solvers ready to affect positive change in their communities. Their global mindset, intercultural competence, and appreciation for the diverse perspectives of others maximizes their abilities to exercise collaborative leadership in real-world environments. Their curiosity, resourcefulness, passion, and strong work ethic are reflected in their commitment to the public good, entrepreneurial initiative, and spirit.*

**IV. Conclusion**

Our appreciative inquiry process was designed to contribute data and recommendations in support of the Mission, Values, and The Mason Graduate Strategic Planning Working Group. It had a secondary, yet powerful, effect of educating the Mason community about the use and benefits of appreciative inquiry. Like the heliotropic effect, many of the AI participants at Mason were inspired by positive stories they contributed and also heard from others. They experienced moments of pride about their Mason affiliation, leaving the focus groups and interviews curious about this method and eager to continue its use at Mason. It is with this spirit we offer this report as a beginning chapter of what it means to *Write Our Own Story* at Mason.
Appendix A

Appreciative Inquiry Facilitators

Dr. Jan Arminio
Higher Education Program

Dr. Ann Baker
School of Public Policy
MasonLeads

Evan Baum
University Life

Elizabeth Bernard
Student Academic Affairs

Addison Brown
Graduate Student
MasonLeads

Dr. Jeannie Brown Leonard
Student Academic Affairs

Chris Clark-Talley
Alumni Affairs
MasonLeads

Kara Danner
University Life
ODKM Alumni

Pat Donini
Human Resources/Payroll
MasonLeads

Kim Eby
Provost Office
MasonLeads

Dr. Mary Francis Forcier
Development Office
MasonLeads

Juliet Blank-Godlove
University Life and Dean of Students Office
MasonLeads
Stacy Guenther
Center for Consciousness and Transformation
MasonLeads and ODKM Alumni

Dr. Linn Jorgenson
University Life and Office of Disability Services

Linda Kovac
Volgenau School of Engineering
ODKM Alumni

Dr. Nick Lennon
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MasonLeads

Dr. Jaime Lester
Higher Education Program
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Dr. Nance Lucas
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MasonLeads Co-Chair

Dr. Julie Owen
New Century College
MasonLeads

Leslie Painter
Patriot Computers, ITU - Security & Project Management
ODKM Alumni

Rose Pascarell
University Life
MasonLeads

Pam Patterson
University Life and Dean of Students Office
MasonLeads Co-Chair

Laura Phelps
DoIT - Communication & Planning
ODKM Alumni

Dr. Paul Rogers
English Department
MasonLeads
Dr. Todd Rose
University Life

Dr. Ashley Sieman
University Life

Amy Snyder
University Life

Dr. Tojo Thatchenkery
School of Public Policy and ODKM
AI Scholar

Dr. Wendy Wagner
New Century College
MasonLeads

Dr. Martha Wescoat-Andes
College of Science
MasonLeads
Appendix B

Appreciative Inquiry Interview Questions

Q1) Think about a few recent positive experiences you have had at Mason that involved interactions with students (classroom, projects, advising, counseling, financial aid, job placement, etc.) or a Mason colleagues (working together on a project or committee). Describe one such event when you felt most alive, excited, valued, or appreciated. Follow-up question: What made it a significant positive experience? Or, what is it about the experience that you continue to cherish?

Q2) Name an event where one of your colleagues did something exemplary at Mason that involved interactions with students (teaching, projects, advising, counseling, mentoring, facilitating a team or committee, etc.)

Q3) What are your images for the ideal Mason graduates? What do you see them doing as productive citizens? Or What will make the Mason graduates unique from other university graduates? What do you see the Mason graduates doing as unique from other university graduates?

Q4) Share an experience you’ve had at Mason that resonated with you so deeply that you’d never want to see that aspect of Mason change or disappear.

Q5) What do you value most about Mason? How have these aspects that you value impacted your experience at Mason? Please share a positive experience you’ve had that demonstrates what you value most about Mason?

Q6) What is a peak moment you’ve experienced at Mason that represents Mason at its best? What core factors give life to our institution when it is at its best?

Q7) What story or experience would you share with someone to convey your feelings of Mason pride? In other words, what is your story of “Mason Pride?”

Q8) What core factors give life to our institution when it’s at its best?

Q9) If you could have any three wishes granted to heighten Mason’s vitality, what would they be?
Appendix C

Interview Report Format

Synthesis from the Interview Data    Fall 2012

Please type or print your responses. Submit one summary per interview and per focus group.

Interviewer/Facilitator Name:

1) Who did you interview or what group did you conduct a focus group with?

   Please list names and affiliations.

2) What were two or three of the most compelling positive Mason experiences that you heard in your focus group/interview?

3) What were the themes that stood out the most for you during your focus group?
   a) Positive Mason experiences
   b) Images and uniqueness of the ideal Mason graduate
   c) Core factors and values that give life to Mason
   d) Mason at its best
   e) Three wishes to heighten Mason’s visibility?

4) What were the most quotable quotes that came out of all of the data?

5) Any other observations?
Appendix D
Appreciative Inquiry Focus Groups

Arlington Campus
Facilities Management Staff
Center for Consciousness and Transformation Staff & Affiliates
New Century College Faculty & Staff
20, 30, 40 + Year Mason Employees (2)
Dean of Students Cluster Directors
University Life Senior Staff
Staff Senate (2)
University Life Directors
Past Presidents of the Alumni Association
Alumni Affairs Staff
Interdisciplinary Curriculum Team
Higher Education Program Graduate Students
Campaign Staff
Mason Alumni
Human Resource Liaisons Group
HR/Payroll Staff
NCLC 204 Intro to Leadership Studies (NCC undergraduate course)
NCLC 435 Leading Change (NCC undergraduate course)
Student Health Services
University Honor Committee
Leadership Training Modules Facilitation Team
Active Leaders Class - Students
Leadership Coordinators
Office of Disability Services
LTEAM Student Group
LEAD Staff Meeting
Freshman/Sophomore Class
Junior/Senior Class
NWPE (Northern Virginia Writing Project Group)
Freshman Composition Class
Center for Social Entrepreneurship Staff
Office of Student Conduct
Office of Academic Integrity
Living Learning Community Coordinators
Mindful Living Learning Community
Resident Advisors
Organization Development and Knowledge Management Alumni Group
The Edge/Mason Center for Team and Org. Learning
Living Learning Community Class - Students
ITU Student Group
ITU Alumni Group
Fundraising/Development at Mason
Volgenau School
Public Relations Community of Practice within Mason
Student Workers in IT
Academic Technology Advisory Committee
IT Staff Meeting
Student Academic Affairs, Advising & Retention Staff
Academic Advising Council
QEP Leadership Council
CTCH 792 04 (Higher Education Program graduate course)
Higher Education Program Faculty
MasonLeads
CTCH 792- Disability and Higher Ed Class (Higher Education Program graduate course)
Office of Disability Services Student Panel
Autism Spectrum Disorder Task Force
Student Senate
MAIS Graduate Students
Student Media Leaders
Campus Recreation Student Employees
Registered Student Organization Leaders
Fraternity and Sorority Student Leaders
The Office of Student Involvement, Student Media, and Campus Recreation
MAP-Works Leadership Committee
Women and Gender Studies Executive Committee
Students as Scholars Student Scholarly Activities Sub-Committee
University 100 Faculty
University 100 Peer Advisors
Assessment Committee
Office of Institutional Assessment Staff
University Life Training & Development Team
University Life Core Values Revision Team
Housing and Residence Life Staff
Auxiliary Enterprises Staff
Patriot Student Leaders